

Impact of social media on the masculine image



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Modern society is putting too much emphasis on the physical appearance of men and it is negatively affecting them physically, mentally and emotionally. People's physical appearance is being credited with increasingly more meaning in today's society. Although this has been an obvious topic of importance for women for nearly all of history, men are also now finding themselves in a similar situation to their gender-specific counterparts. Body image is no longer just a women's issue. These recently imposed physical standards for men is causing damage to their physical, mental, and emotional health and most of those who are affected are unaware of the tolls.

While exercise and nutrition are the foundation of good health, extreme practices are becoming the norm of the American male lifestyle. The increasing emphasis on men to always look their best is causing them to resort to more drastic measures to obtain their ideal body. Newly found obsessions such as extreme variations of dieting are fad alternative lifestyle practices that are gaining popularity. While these measures are usually effective for cutting weight, they are typically unhealthy. Dieting through cleanses are becoming more popular but have been around since the past few decades. A cleanse is where the person only consumes specific low-calorie liquids from fruits and vegetables to "cleanse" the body of "toxins" (Lien). A juice cleanse can last from three days to over a week. Diets like these leave the person vastly under their functioning calorie intake. While they can be effective for weight loss, they leave the person in a constant state of low blood sugar. This greatly decreases cognitive abilities and leaves the person without energy(Lien). This can be incredibly dangerous when

paired with especially difficult exercise where the body needs these calories to operate and maintain basic functions. Also, these dieting styles are not maintainable for long-term goals. While the person does usually some cut weight during their cleanse, they typically gain it back when they resume their regular lifestyles. This can lead to a feeling of helplessness as they got closer to their goals and then were suddenly brought back to their original state. This in turn can compel them to focus even harder on the cleanse and extreme exercise, which would even further harm the body and can eventually lead to liver failure if not corrected. Besides the physical and mental effect, this combination can cause great emotional fluctuations. Constantly low blood sugar not cause by diabetes, called fasting hypoglycemia, causes the person to have dramatic emotional and mental instability. Effects like aggression, fatigue, and lethargy are very common for people who are undergoing these practices. These effects not only cause direct emotional and mental damage, but can put stress on social relationships. Overall, the damage extreme dieting can cause outweighs the merits, but many still flock to the " get fit quick" schemes due to the allure of the promise of rapid changes.

Substance abuse is becoming more popular due to the false, but increasingly common, thought of muscle equaling health and beauty. This mentality glorifies an unnaturally muscular body type while shaming those without. The term substance abuse is used here to refer primarily to anabolic steroids, which are synthesized hormones that promote muscular growth. The two groups of men most affected by the rising trend of anabolic steroids abuse are those who already have a relatively fit body and older men. As for

those who fall in the former category, they are finding that while they are seeing some results, the results of their exercise are not dramatic enough. This is resulting in them imploring the aid of hormone supplementation to reach their lofty goals. Harvard's Movement Science Professor, Eik-Nes, describes that young men who are infatuated with their body image are four times as likely to use anabolic steroids than the average male (qtd. in Midling). She also claims that her research has found that 1 in 10 young men suffer from body image obsessions. Her studies indicate that muscles in this context act like cosmetics, since they are training them not for strength or function, but for aesthetics. As for the older population of males, the primary reason that they are beginning to abuse anabolic steroids is that they are trying to compensate for a lack of hormone production. Hormone production greatly declines after 40, and the body these men used to have, or even want to have, becomes less obtainable (Foster). While it is difficult to blame these men for wanting to enhance their bodies, the use of anabolic steroids has a wide range of adverse health effects. Steroid usage leads to a wide range of adverse effects. These effects include: liver and kidney problems, enlargement of the cardiovascular muscles which impedes blood flow, emotional instability because of excess hormones, and many other problems. Despite all of the clear reasons to avoid these substances, men still seek them out. The fact that 56% of men who abuse steroids notice the adverse effects indicates that this issue is not about health, but about being muscularly aesthetic no matter the cost (Bahri).

Cosmetics directed towards men are another area that emphasizes the recent emergence of male beauty idolization. Cosmetics are commonly

attributed to femininity. While many men still see cosmetics as feminine, there is little doubt that there is a resurgence of male cosmetics. Men are now brandishing makeup brushes to cover up their imperfections as females do. In 1980s to the 2000s terms like “metrosexuality” and “guyliner” began emerging as culturally significant (Montel). As more celebrities and persons of interest began wearing makeup outside of professional movie settings, the more average took notice and followed suit (Montell). Since then there have been numerous marketing campaigns for makeup specifically made for males. Many cosmetics fashioned for women are designed to highlight their features with sometimes unnatural colorations for a more dramatic look. As for males, items like exfoliating scrubs, lip balms, primers, concealers and color correctors have aimed at hiding blemishes while maintaining the discretion of cosmetic use to obtain an image of effortless perfection (Montell). Men’s cosmetic choices are partly due to the fact that makeup is still a terrain that is unfamiliar for most men. The average male is unwilling to be acknowledged as a cosmetic user so they try to keep it subtle and discrete. This may be from the shame men feel may be placed on them for being feminine for using cosmetic products. However, cosmetic use is a benign way to cover up their imperfections especially when considering the adverse effects of most beauty enhancing products, practices, and procedures.

Cosmetic procedures are something that the average person would be hard-pressed to find as recently as just a few decades ago. Through increasing medical competencies and technological advances these surgeries are becoming cheaper and more easily obtained. Medical procedures such as

liposuction, eye-lift surgeries, tummy-tucks and facelifts are currently on the rise, with more than 1.3 million cosmetic procedures performed on men in 2017 (Ross). Since more people are having access to these procedures the problems they exert are becoming increasingly obvious. While there are very few immediate physical dangers to these procedures, the ill effects can be seen elsewhere. These procedures provide quick fixes to physical shortcomings and in some practice, they are not harmful. Facial reconstruction from accidents or birth defects are some areas that this field has excelled in and these procedures have helped many. The problem arises when people who are suffering from Body Dysmorphia Disease go under the knife (Yazdandoost). Body Dysmorphia Disease, B. D. D., is a body-image disorder that affects more than 1 in 30 Americans and is characterized with intense focus on perceived flaws in their physical appearance (Schneider). This means that their problem is psychiatric rather than a physical one. No matter how successful the surgery is in fixing their immediate concern towards their body flaw, it only exacerbates their obsession with perfection. B. D. D. sufferers will mentally latch onto another perceived flaw or find that the procedure wasn't perfect and should be reattempted. This creates a pattern of finding and fixing flaws through medical procedures, and can become an addiction to cosmetic procedures that are increasingly easier to obtain.

Men are now finding themselves to be inadequately attractive due to an increasing presence of social media where a "glorification of aesthetics" mentality is prevalent. Over the past decade there has been an emergence of numerous social networking platforms, such as *SnapChat* and *Instagram*.

Social media outlets like these were created to be platforms to share our thoughts and lives and have become incredibly popular. Despite their popularity, these sites have given us the adverse effect where we compare our entire lives, and thus our success, to a huge audience that is only presenting their best side. These sites cater to a “ like-chasing” mentality. This mentality leads to each photo being carefully designed to look its best to generate as many likes, and thus publicity, as possible. This is causing both men and women to compare themselves to these perfectly orchestrated images, and it is taking a serious toll. The percentage of men dissatisfied with their overall appearance has nearly tripled in the past 25 years and that nearly as many men as women are unhappy with how they look (Pope). This can be partially attributed to their news feeds being increasingly clogged with professional photos of celebrities, models, and internet personas pushing a product or agenda. Photo-rendering, expensive attire, lighting manipulation and carefully applied makeup are making these already unnatural bodies appear even more pleasing to the average person. The photos on these sites are normalizing a type of aesthetic that the average person simply can't obtain through traditional methods or with an average disposable income. When these men fall short of these imposed standards, they begin to feel ashamed. Researchers at the University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria confirmed the notion that “ a tendency for social comparisons goes along with a diminished desire for social interaction and feeds into body image disorders” (Foster and Shorter, 2015). Published Psychologist C. Schneider states that most research confirms that as men continue to compare themselves to the personas of social media, their self-comparisons become increasingly negative.

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Newly exhibited trends in social culture have led people to pursue near-perfection in body image through newly available means from freshly presented sources. Although this is a pressure that women have been subject to for a long time many men are now finding themselves in a similar situation to their gender-specific counterparts. As men's physical appearance gains increasingly more importance in society, the practices that are required to achieve such a feat have become more unnatural and unmaintainable. A vision of bodily perfection is in most ways unhealthy. An attempt for men to better themselves is understandable even if the new standard placed on men is in most part abusive physically, mentally and emotionally.

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